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AD HOC COMMITTEE ON THE INDIAN OCEAN

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 439th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Tuesday, 27 June 1995, at 11 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. DE SILVA (Sri Lanka)

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The meeting was called to order at 11.35 a.m.

OPENING OF THE SESSION

1. The CHAIRMAN declared open the 1995 substantive session of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Indian Ocean and said that the postponement of the meeting by one day had been due to his attendance at the previous day's 50th anniversary celebrations of the signing of the Charter of the United Nations at San Francisco.

ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIRMEN

2. The CHAIRMAN said that, regarding the election of a Vice-Chairman from the Group of Eastern European States, his consultations with the Group's coordinator had shown that the Group was not yet in a position to nominate a candidate for the post.

IMPLEMENTATION OF GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION 49/82 OF 15 DECEMBER 1994

3. The CHAIRMAN said that the agenda item dealing with the implementation of General Assembly resolution 49/82 basically encompassed the substantive element of the current year's session and that the various elements of the item were all closely inter-related. Of particular importance were operative paragraphs 4 and 5 of General Assembly resolution 49/82, which expressed the conviction that the participation of all permanent members of the Security Council as well as major maritime users in the Committee's work was important and would greatly facilitate the development of a mutually beneficial dialogue to advance peace, security and stability in the Indian Ocean region and which requested the Chairman to consult with the Governments of the relevant States which had withdrawn from the Committee and encourage them to resume their participation and cooperation in the work of the Committee.

4. In that connection, he had consulted with the Governments of France, the United Kingdom and the United States in their respective capitals. During those consultations, particular reference had been made to the emerging international climate of confidence and the termination of super-Power rivalry following the end of the cold war; the end of apartheid in South Africa; the entry into force of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea; and the start of the Middle East peace process, all of which presented new opportunities for regional and global cooperation in the Indian Ocean region. Cooperation in strengthening peace, security and stability in that region could also be pursued on the basis of various alternative approaches that had come up for discussion in the Ad Hoc Committee. The adoption of such approaches would largely depend on the measure of consensus reached by all the States concerned. To that end, dialogue and a frank exchange of views were needed, for which the Ad Hoc Committee provided an ideal forum. In addition, the concept behind the Declaration of the Indian Ocean as a Zone of Peace included the valuable idea of a "community of Indian Ocean States". Similar concepts were contained in recent proposals by Australia, India, Mauritius and South Africa.

5. Renewed participation by the three permanent members of the Security Council which had withdrawn from the Committee in 1989 would be greatly

conducive to the success of the Committee's work, and the views of those Governments on how best to proceed in the matter towards that objective would be welcomed.

6. The reasons for the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the Ad Hoc Committee had been explained at a meeting with the authorities of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in London. Although the United Kingdom Government favoured the idea of establishing nuclear-weapon-free zones and zones of peace in general, it had disagreed with certain aspects of the 1971 Declaration and the approaches which that Declaration had set in motion. The United Kingdom Government had said that it was necessary to reconsider the mandate of the Ad Hoc Committee, although it was appreciative of the positive developments that had taken place in the Committee. In a subsequent formal communication from the Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom to the United Nations, the Chairman had been informed that, at that juncture, the United Kingdom Government did not believe that there was sufficient reason to reconsider its decision to withdraw from the Committee, but that it had noted with particular interest the new alternative approaches proposed during the 1994 session.

7. The position of the French Government, which had been outlined by representatives of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, was that it did not wish to subscribe to the 1971 Declaration. However, France was interested in the work of the Ad Hoc Committee and the concept of a zone of peace and was prepared to examine the new alternative approaches. The French Government was not prepared to rejoin the Ad Hoc Committee while the 1971 Declaration remained in its original form and, specifically, as long as the provisions on the dismantling of bases and military installations remained unchanged. At the same time, it did not rule out the possibility of rejoining the Ad Hoc Committee if its views were taken into consideration by that body.

8. At a meeting at the State Department in Washington, representatives of the United States Government had explained the circumstances which had compelled the United States to withdraw from the Committee, expressed interest in the new approaches, signalled appreciation of the value of the Committee as a forum for the discussion of wide-ranging issues and stated that their Government's response would be communicated in due course. That response was still awaited.

9. The sum total of the consultations seemed to indicate that there was no immediate prospect of the three permanent members returning to the Committee during the current session. They needed additional time to consider the question more fully, and the dialogue with them should therefore be continued.

10. The Committee was constantly monitoring developments in the Indian Ocean region. While great-Power rivalry had further abated, the region was still not entirely free of tension and he suggested that members of the Committee should indicate their own perception of developments since the previous session.

11. On a positive note, various forms of dialogue had commenced in the region which served to promote the objectives which the Committee was pursuing. He was certain that the Committee would benefit if delegations whose Governments had taken multilateral and regional initiatives affecting the Indian Ocean would brief the Committee about them.

12. The Committee's future role needed to be considered, including possible suggestions about adjusting its current mandate to better reflect contemporary realities and enable it to respond more effectively to them. A pragmatic approach was necessary for the fulfilment of the Committee's objectives and efforts should be made to avoid the repetition of obsolete issues.

13. Mr. ROWE (Australia) said that while the Committee had turned away from the unproductive, divisive approaches of the past, it had yet to find a precise new direction for itself which would entice the major Powers to renew their interest in its work. His delegation therefore urged the Chairman to continue the dialogue which he had begun with the three permanent members of the Security Council.

14. In 1993, the Committee had recommended moving away from a mandate fixed on the idea of convening a conference, and had instead sought to find new alternative approaches to implementing the zone of peace concept. During the current year, efforts had been made to elaborate on the new alternative approaches suggested in the annex to the 1994 report but not agreed to by all delegations, with a view to giving new impetus to the process of strengthening cooperation and ensuring peace, security and stability in the Indian Ocean region.

15. At the same time, the General Assembly could not be expected to continue renewing the Committee's mandate to look at "new alternative approaches", as though that label by itself constituted sufficient justification for the Committee's existence. Members needed to take a careful, modest approach, concentrating on areas where consensus was possible rather than using the Committee as a platform for positions which were unacceptable to some delegations and not particularly interesting to others. Serious efforts were also needed to achieve consensus.

16. His delegation would welcome a consensus agreement on the Committee's future working methods and possibly even on a programme of work for its next session. That could be the Committee's task for the current year.

17. At some stage, the Committee would have to consider what role it wanted to play in the future: a policy-making role, a monitoring role, or both. It should keep itself informed of the facts regarding cooperation in the region, without necessarily trying to dictate the future direction of regional initiatives.

18. Australia was pleased to have participated in the conference establishing the Indian Ocean rim initiative, held in Mauritius from 29 to 31 March. The meeting had adopted a number of basic principles for regional cooperation and had set out objectives for cooperation, including promotion of the welfare of the population in participating countries and formulation of economic cooperation programmes.

19. Australia had hosted an international forum on Indian Ocean issues at Perth from 11 to 13 June 1995. The forum had consisted of plenary sessions and two working groups, one on economic issues and one on other issues. Agreement had been reached on establishing an international business forum and a research

network, both of which were expected to meet in India at the end of the year. Other working groups had also been established, including a working group on maritime cooperation and a working group on comprehensive security approaches. That showed that cooperation on issues relevant to peace in the Indian Ocean region had already begun.

20. The decision by the President of France to resume nuclear testing in the South Pacific was deeply offensive to Australia and other countries in the region, which were greatly concerned about the possible environmental consequences of nuclear testing at Mururoa. The decision made a mockery of the commitment to work towards the elimination of nuclear weapons which France had made at the Review and Extension Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). France's decision abused the trust of the many countries which, despite their national policy preferences, had agreed to an indefinite extension of the Treaty. It played into the hands of those countries which refused to adhere to the principle of non-proliferation. The countries of the South Pacific region had urged France to reconsider its decision. As current Chair of the South Pacific Forum, Australia had sent a statement to the Secretary-General on behalf of the Permanent Representatives of member States that were members of the South Pacific Forum, deploring France's decision. Australia also noted the growing number of expressions of condemnation of France's decision to resume nuclear testing that were coming from around the world.

21. Mr. MOMEN (Bangladesh) said that the Committee had to continue its consideration of new alternative approaches on the basis of its deliberations in 1993 and 1994, with a view to reaching early agreement on how to give new impetus to the process of strengthening cooperation and ensuring peace, security and stability in the Indian Ocean region. In 1994, the Committee had agreed that, in addition to considering and developing new alternative approaches, it was also important to build on areas where consensus had already been reached. The current and future work of the Committee should be devoted to that approach.

22. At its 1994 session, the Committee had been able to identify some possible new alternative approaches, although no agreement had been reached on them. Such approaches nevertheless constituted a good beginning and the current session should focus on reaching early agreement on them. Bangladesh had consistently supported the initiative to declare the Indian Ocean a zone of peace and the goal of creating an ordered, neutral, demilitarized and nuclear-free regime through joint efforts within and outside the region. The basic objective was to create an environment that would preserve and consolidate the national independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the littoral and hinterland States and help them solve their outstanding problems.

23. The international situation was now more favourable to regional cooperation. The entry into force in November 1994 of the United Nations Convention on the Law on the Sea had enhanced the prospects for intraregional and interregional cooperation. New regional cooperation initiatives were attempting to identify possible areas for economic, trade, environmental, tourism, scientific, technological and human resources development cooperation. Bangladesh viewed such initiatives as the Mauritius conference and the recent forum in Australia as complementary to and supportive of the work undertaken by

the Ad Hoc Committee and the overall objectives of the concept of the Indian Ocean as a zone of peace. It was vitally important to elicit the participation of all major maritime users and the permanent members of the Security Council in the Committee's work on strengthening peace and security in the Indian Ocean region.

24. Mr. GRANOVSKY (Russian Federation) said that his country attached great importance to ensuring peace and security in the Indian Ocean region. The task of establishing a zone of peace in the Indian Ocean was still an urgent one in terms of consolidating universal peace. He regarded the Committee's work as a step towards the practical implementation of measures designed to strengthen security in the Indian Ocean and adjacent regions, and favoured the participation in its work of all major world Powers and the principal users of the Indian Ocean.

25. The departure from the politics of all-out confrontation between East and West and the switch to equal partnership had established favourable conditions for security and cooperation in the region. Russia had cut back its military presence there and was expanding its mutually advantageous relations with the States of the region. It expected other Powers from outside the region to similarly review their continuing military presence and to cut it back to the minimum level necessary to maintain peace and security in the region. It was convinced that regional Powers had a key role to play in initiating dialogue in the Indian Ocean region, and that they should display considerable flexibility and a constructive approach.

26. The Ad Hoc Committee on the Indian Ocean could also prove a good instrument of dialogue. To that end, its mandate should be altered to incorporate in the Committee's discussions, and establish linkages between, the issues of promotion of the idea of demilitarization, further confidence-building measures and the introduction of a qualitatively new approach to cooperation and integration in the Indian Ocean.

27. At the previous session, his delegation had put forward its own specific proposals regarding a new mandate for the Committee. It believed that such a mandate should provide for the conclusion at the regional level of a system of agreements between the States concerned on the non-use of force, respect for territorial integrity and the inviolability of borders, non-interference in internal affairs, and the peaceful settlement of disputes. The zone of peace could stipulate measures to limit the arms race in the region, for example non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, ballistic missiles and the most destructive kinds of conventional weapons and action by the countries of the region to reduce their armed forces to a level adequate for their own defence. The countries of the region could reach agreement on a suitable system for monitoring compliance with those agreements, while Powers from outside the region could undertake to respect the status of the zone and review the issue of cutting back their own military presence in the region. The guarantors of the zone could be the permanent members of the Security Council. In addition to military measures, such a blueprint could also provide for cooperation in the social, economic, scientific, technological and environmental fields.

The meeting rose at 12.20 p.m.